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Christ the Teacher of Immortality.

We enjoy two distinct sources of religious knowledge,—*nature* and *revelation*. To which of these do we owe our knowledge of a future state? Does the light of nature incontrovertibly prove such a state? Or has Christ alone the words of eternal life, so that, had he not come into the world, no man could have had sufficient reason to expect existence after death? The latter is my own opinion. And, in order to prove it, I shall examine separately the principal arguments which are offered, independently of revelation, for a future state of existence; and shall attempt to show that they are not only insufficient, but of themselves weak. But in doing this, I wish it to be distinctly understood that, while I regard all these arguments together as furnishing no adequate *proof* of man's immortality, I value them highly as *confirming* the Christian doctrine of immortality. Far be it from me to extinguish the light of nature, that I may make that of the gospel shine the brighter. They are both lights which God's own hand has kindled in the moral firmament,—but that of nature is the lesser light, and never beams so brightly as when it borrows lustre from the written word.

1. Perhaps no argument is urged more frequently in favour of man's immortality than the *general consent* of men of different ages and nations. But this consent was by no means general before the promulgation of Christianity. The ancient Egyptians had no idea of any immortality beyond that which the art of embalming may be said, almost without hyperbole, to have conferred on the body. There certainly is not in the Pentateuch, I doubt whether there can be found in the

whole of the Old Testament, a single distinct recognition of the doctrine of a future life; and in our Saviour's time it was denied by a large and influential sect among the Jews. Among the ancient Greeks and Romans the immortality of the soul was the subject of hope rather than of belief among the common people; was rejected by several of the most learned and numerous sects of philosophers; and was called in question even by Socrates and Cicero, who are often cited as firm believers in it. Its partial prevalence may be easily accounted for. It must have necessarily suggested itself as possible to many minds; and, when the possibility of a life after death was once suggested, thousands would embrace the belief simply from their love of life and desire of its continuance.

Since the promulgation of Christianity, a belief in the immortality of the soul has been prevalent among all the nations with which Christians have been conversant,—and for a very adequate reason,—because they have been conversant with Christians, have heard from them the chief doctrine of their system, and have transplanted it into their own systems as congenial with their feelings and desires. The New Hollanders and other recently discovered nations, that had had no previous intercourse with Christians, have been found to be wholly ignorant of a future state.

But even supposing that the belief in a future state had been universal, if this universal consent were the only argument that our neighbours, that the Hindoo, that the Tartar, that the Roman, that Plato, that Socrates could offer, we should have no valid ground for believing with the rest of mankind. Universal consent and for a long time together, has time and again been given to propositions which we now deem false and absurd. The time has often been in the history of the world when universal consent would have testified to the existence, not of one Supreme Divinity, but of gods many and lords many. With the exception of Jacob and his posterity, all mankind for more than two thousand years would have borne testimony, almost without a dissenting voice, against the unity of God. Universal consent cannot then be pleaded as a sufficient ground for our belief in man's immortality.

2. *The death of young children* has been offered as furnishing a strong presumption in favour of a future state of existence. It is said that, unless they pass hence into another life, there is an unprecedented waste of creative power,—a

waste inconsistent with the divine wisdom. But, admitting that in this case there is an apparent waste of creative power, is this waste unprecedented? Do we not see in every department of the divine government a superfluity of results? Thus it must be, so long as uniformity of operation is maintained. The rain falls upon the ocean, the barren sea-shore, the mountain crag, as well as upon the forest, field, and garden. The richest fruits ripen and pass away untasted. The oak extends its shade where neither man nor beast reposes beneath it. The sun and moon shed their beams upon the pathless desert as well as upon the haunts of men. Though in the eye of God we believe that nothing wants its use and its end, yet to human vision many things are made in vain.

But in fact this apparent waste of creative power does not take place with regard to the infant. However short life may have been, he has not lived in vain. He has probably enjoyed more than he has suffered. He has called into exercise the strongest and purest affections of the human heart; and his departure has been a means of salutary moral discipline. Besides, the possibility of the death of infants offers an additional motive to parental diligence and fidelity, and augments the ardour of parental affection. It also deepens in men's minds a sense of their constant liability to death, and of the necessity of being constantly prepared for it. Thus, though the lamp of life be hardly kindled ere it be quenched never again to be rekindled, its short-lived burning has served important purposes; and therefore, though the highest consolation that a Christian parent can receive for the loss of a child results from the belief that the child has been removed to a better world, he has no right from the bare fact of his child's death to infer the existence of that better world.

3. *The strength of the social affections* is urged as an argument in favour of the immortality of the soul. It is said that a benevolent God would not have endowed men with the capacity of forming friendships so intimate, so tender, unless he had designed that these friendships should be indissoluble. But is it not a belief in the indissolubleness of friendship that makes friendship thus strong? Are not Christians, who entertain as firm a faith in their eternal, as they have in their present existence, the very persons who most frequently form attachments which neither distance, nor danger, nor death can dissolve? And is not the idea of their eternal duration the most important element in forming and perfecting such attachments? I doubt very much whether an attachment of

that character and intensity ever subsisted between two Atheists, or between two persons who had no idea of a future state. Indeed the personal and domestic history of infidelity during its late reign in France, is so full of suspicion, jealousy, and perfidy, as to force upon the mind the conviction that cordial and ardent friendship cannot subsist among unbelievers.*

Moreover, is not much that is said about the strength and permanence even of virtuous friendship, mere hyperbole? Do not those whose hearts, interests, and hopes seemed one, soon and easily overcome the grief of parting? I know that there are instances in which persons go mourning all their days for the early death of some cherished relative or companion. But these instances are always spoken of as remarkable,—are regarded as exceptions to the general rule. In most cases, a bereaved individual after a few weeks or months recovers his buoyancy of spirit, is able to enter anew with his former interest upon the business and the pleasures of life, and to form new friendships in lieu of that which has been dissolved. Not that man is hard-hearted. But God has graciously endowed his mind with an elasticity, by which it can buoy itself up and throw off the heaviest pressure. And does not this comparatively speedy and easy recovery from the loss of valued friends weaken greatly the argument drawn from our social connexions in favour of a future life?

Further, suppose that we waive the foregoing considerations, and admit in its full force the argument for a future life drawn from the strength of earthly attachments, it will prove too much,—it will prove more than any of us would be willing to admit. We discern in the brute creation the traces of deeper and more permanent attachment, and of more poignant anguish at bereavement, than we often witness in man. He who could hear the orphan's or widow's wail unmoved, could hardly refrain from weeping with the turtle-dove whose mate has become the fowler's victim. Bereavement seldom occasions death to the human mourner; but dogs and horses have often died sorrow-stricken upon the graves of their masters. And now if, on the ground of the strength and permanence of earthly attachments, we suppose a future life where *human* friendships will be renewed we must on the

* Numerous illustrations of the remark in the text might be drawn from such works as Rousseau's Confessions, Marmontel's Memoirs, the Life of Diderot, &c.

same ground suppose also a paradise where the turtle-dove will meet her lost and mourned one, and the dog caress the master whom he loved more than his own life. But the immortality of the brute creation no sane man in this enlightened age will admit; and an argument that proves too much proves nothing. The nature of the social affections then affords no sufficient argument in favour of man's immortality.

4. But how is it with *man's capacity of intellectual improvement?* It is often said that, unless man were designed for continued existence, it would have been useless to have given him a mind capable of indefinite improvement. But how do we know that the mind is capable of indefinite improvement? This is not an independent truth, but a corollary from the doctrine of immortality. We find the mind capable of improvement through the whole of the present life, and argue from analogy that it will be so through the whole of the future life, and therefore that it is capable of indefinite improvement. But if we do not derive from some foreign source the fact of the mind's continued existence, we can assert nothing of its capacities except what has been verified in human experience and observation. Suppose, for instance, that Newton, when at the acme of his intellectual greatness, had the loftiest and strongest mind that ever tenanted a human body, how know we that our minds have any inherent capacity of going beyond what his was? We are conscious that there is room for improvement; but, when we have measured the distance between what we are and what he was, we have measured all the room for improvement of which we have cognizance,—we have reached, so far as we know, the limits of human capacity.

But, suppose that we were conscious of an inherent capacity in human nature of reaching intellectual strength and attainments vastly beyond those that have been reached in this world by any human being, there may yet be room even here for the exercise of the loftiest powers of mind of which we can conceive. Other races of animals remain unimproved and unimprovable century after century. Man alone improves from generation to generation; and, through the power of speech and the art of writing, the improvements of each may be transmitted to every subsequent generation, and each may enter at once upon that portion of the career at which the preceding left it. Thus truths which a century ago constituted the *arcana* of a scientific few, are now taught as axioms in the nursery. Thus an intelligent child of twelve years of

age, at the present day, probably knows more of mathematical, physical, and moral science than Cicero knew on the day of his death; and the time may come when the lisping infant will laugh to scorn the wisdom of the wisest of our cotemporaries. The past, when viewed with philosophic eye, exhibits an uninterrupted progress of the human mind; and we have therefore good reason to anticipate a similar progress for all future time, so that all man's intellectual powers may one day be called into exercise even here. Man's high intellectual capacities do not then incontrovertibly prove a future state.

5. *The unequal distribution of happiness and misery in this life* is farther urged by those who would prove a future life independently of revelation. It is asserted that there is no such thing as a righteous retribution here, and that, in order to maintain the divine impartiality, we must suppose a future state where the inequalities of the present life will be rectified,—and where virtue will be rewarded, and the sinner will eat of the fruit of his doings.

But is retribution thus imperfect in the present state? I admit that the *external* favours of Providence are indiscriminately conferred. But is their conferment of itself a blessing? How often are they the sources of splendid misery, the means of sin, the snares of the soul! Is the loss or want of them a curse? How often is it a means of moral culture, a source of moral power, a fountain of spiritual happiness! The body is not the seat of joy or of sorrow. Its every craving may be satiated, while the soul that tenants it suffers most intensely. Its whole frame may be convulsed or marred, while the mind is not only calm, but joyous. Vice is misery, virtue happiness, wherever found. Would you see the real sufferer? Seek for him whom the estate of the widow or the fatherless has arrayed in scarlet, who fares sumptuously on the spoils of the needy, whose abode is the paradise of sin. Seek for him who has mounted by an unholy path to the summit of ambition. Seek for him who enjoys the respect of every one but himself. And would you see the truly happy man? Behold him who lives in poverty, because he would not enrich himself with the wages of sin. Behold the wounded patriot on the field of victory. Behold Socrates giving lessons of virtue while the poison discharges its deadly office. Behold the martyr in the midst of the flames, his parched lips raising the song of triumph. But if the friends of virtue are in this life happy in proportion to their virtue, and the votaries of vice miserable in proportion to their sinfulness, justice is in fact

administered here,—a righteous retribution takes place here, and the divine impartiality is vindicated without supposing a future state of being.

But let us suppose for a moment that a perfect retribution does not take place in this world, what proof then have we of the divine impartiality? Observation furnishes none. Analogy furnishes none,—it even furnishes a presumption to the contrary; for in our fellow-men we see benevolence much more frequently than justice, and often see lavish generosity united with extreme capriciousness in the bestowal of favours. And if in the government of God we discern an arbitrariness in the bestowal of favours, and a neglect of strict justice in the distribution of rewards and punishments, the inference of unenlightened reason would be that he, like too many of his creatures is essentially capricious and partial. Unless God manifests himself as a just as well as a good being, it is impossible to demonstrate his justice, and we therefore have no right to assume it in order to prove man's immortality. The alledged imperfection of the present state furnishes then no adequate proof of a future state, in which the inequalities of the present will be rectified.

6. The last argument in favour of man's immortality drawn from considerations independent of divine revelation which I shall at this time notice, is that derived from the *immateriality of the soul.* It is said that material agents have no power over spirit,—that the causes which lead to the dissolution of the body cannot suspend the operations of the mind,—that there is no reason why the soul, simple, etherial, spiritual as it is in its essence, should cease to exist at death. This reasoning of course supposes the immateriality of the soul to be a doctrine of natural religion or of metaphysical science. I confess that I cannot regard in it that light. I cannot but regard the immateriality of the thinking principle as altogether a doctrine of revelation,—as a corollary from the Christian doctrine of immortality.

A very superficial observation of the phenomena of body and mind might indeed lead us to suppose that the mind existed independently of material organization. We find that the body may be mutilated, may be in a state of entire prostration or of rapid decay, while the mind retains its full vigour. At the approach of dissolution the intellectual powers are often intensely active, triumphing over decay, putting forth at the moment of emancipation an energy to which in seasons of health they had been strangers. And one might naturally

argue from these things that the principle which mutilation, pain, infirmity, and decay affect not, would survive them all,—would survive death of which they are the harbingers and causes. But carry the inquiry a little farther. Recur to the recent disclosures of anatomical research. See how exactly the degree of intellect is apportioned in each instance to the quantity and advantageous location of the brain. Touch that brain. Let external force compress it, let a fever inflame it, let an aqueous secretion relax its texture; and where is the man?—the reasoning, reflecting man? Where is the master mind? Its once gifted possessor is a maniac or an ideot; and remains so for life, or until the cause which made him so is removed. Are not emotion, thought, and volition then *material* phenomena? That they are so the mere physiologist must confess. That they are so, did not my Bible teach me differently, I should be constrained to admit. But, when I read there that man is not the creature of a day, but the sharer of his Maker's immortality,—when I see Christ, the herald of eternal life, attesting, by mighty works, the divinity of his mission,—when the chief of his apostles informs me that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God,—when I consider that the cannibal often dies with the flesh of his fellow-man incorporated in his own,—when I reflect that, were the archangel's trumpet at this moment to sound the signal for a material resurrection, every particle of dust in my body, would find hundreds of revivified claimants,—then, and not till then, am I convinced that there is a spirit in man,—a spirit which emanated from the Father of Spirits, and which, when it leaves the world, must return to Him for judgment. In fine, I believe the thinking principle to be immaterial, simply because the Bible assures me that it is immortal, and I know from its very nature that no modification of matter can be immortal.

But, admitting the immateriality of the soul to be established by considerations independent of revelation, still it is far from proving man's immortality. If the soul be immaterial, it cannot indeed be changed or destroyed by *material* agents. But it may be put out of existence by Him who brought it into existence. God cannot light up a fire which it is out of his own power to extinguish. The soul, no less than the body, must depend entirely upon his will and the constant effort of his power for every moment of its existence. And therefore, in order to assure us that it will exist for ever, we need his word, his express promise that he will preserve

it in existence. The immateriality of the soul then, even if it could be proved independently of revelation, does not of itself prove man's immortality.

Thus have we seen that the doctrine of immortality, as an article of *natural* religion, rests on but a slender foundation. Thus it must be from the very nature of the case. For how can a system of things liable to constant change, decay, and dissolution give us unwavering assurance respecting an eternity which will be but begun, when the heavens shall pass away and the earth shall be no more? Truths pertaining to eternity must from their very nature be subjects only for *testimony*. God's existence, power, providence, wisdom, and mercy may be and are *manifested*. Nature, though she has no audible voice, bears speechless testimony to them day and night without ceasing. But we needed *words* of eternal life. And, thanks be to God, Christ has uttered those words upon earth; and God has borne testimony to him and with him by a voice from the most excellent glory, by such works as no man could do unless God were with him, by raising up from the dead the herald of immortal life.

We are then to look to Christ primarily for the doctrine of eternal life. Let not however the design of the foregoing discussion be mistaken. In attempting to show that the natural arguments in favour of man's immortality are not of themselves conclusive, I do not mean to undervalue them, on the other hand I prize them highly, as collateral and accessory arguments. When the light of immortality from the gospel beams upon the expanse of nature, it shines with new lustre; and we see throughout the visible universe the image of things invisible and eternal. A thousand analogies present themselves to confirm the teachings of revelation. Nature, which, till Christ spake the words of eternal life, spake them not, now utters them forth full, loud, and clear. The heavens are clothed in purer lustre, the earth in richer beauty, as the dawning rays of eternity rest upon them.

> Bright is the golden sun above,
> And beautiful the flowers that bloom,
> And all is joy, and all is love,
> Reflected from the world to come.

The reader may perhaps ask, if we believe in man's immortality, what matters it whether we regard it as a doctrine of natural religion confirmed by Christ, or a doctrine of revelation confirmed by nature? To this question the general answer might be made, that, in order to defend a doctrine, it

is necessary to know on what ground it properly rests. But there are two important practical uses which may be made of the view of this subject presented in the foregoing article.

1. If we depend upon Christ mainly for the doctrine of immortality, we shall cherish the deeper reverence for the Christian revelation and its records. If the New Testament only passed a sentence of confirmation on doctrines previously established,—if it were only a codification of the laws or principles of natural religion, it would be precious indeed, but not inestimable. It would barely simplify and accelerate the work which our own experience and observation might perform without it. But if the most momentous, the most interesting, the most glorious truth that relates to our nature and our destiny, be strictly and exclusively a doctrine of the New Testament, then that volume is indeed our richest treasure, and Christ, next to God, the most worthy object of our gratitude and love.

2. Deists are fond of holding out the idea that a Christian, by renouncing Christianity, need not give up the doctrine of eternal life. They maintain that it is a doctrine of natural religion, which the impostors who promulgated Christianity borrowed thence to gain the popular favour. Now he, who believes nature adequate to teach this all-important truth, will yield himself more readily to the influence of those who would lead him to deny the gospel and the Saviour.

If the reasoning of the foregoing pages have been in the main just, it behoves us to cherish eternal life as *the gift of God through Jesus Christ*. Let us contemplate nature with wonder, love, and adoration. But let us not think to guide our steps, and to gain support, consolation, and joy by her dictates alone. Her light was indeed precious, when its dim, moon-like lustre gleamed upon a world sunk in superstition and sin. But upon us the Sun of Righteousness has dawned. Lord to whom else then should we go? Thou alone hast the words of eternal life.

Letter addressed to Rev. L. W.

[Concluded from page 483.]

We pass now to the practical use of the doctrine of the Trinity. You represented that it is of great importance, to understand the grounds and consistency of the work of re-

demption; and, of course, to know the natural dignity of the agent by whom this great work has been accomplished. You appeared to assume this principle; that *as mankind are rational beings, they ought to exercise their understanding in the matter of religion*, and in the use of it, come to an acquaintance with the consistency and dependence of its different parts. I have, Sir, been surprised at hearing Trinitarians so strongly assert the importance of *well understanding the grounds and proprieties of religious doctrine:* at hearing them so confidently declare that the Lord Jesus Christ must have been *truly God*, or he would not have been competent to work out salvation for those on behalf of whom he came down from heaven: at hearing them unhesitatingly declare that their hope of salvation in Christ would totally fail them, the moment they should cease to believe that he is, in the highest and most proper sense, *Divine* and *Almighty*:—when, however, that objections are urged against the doctrine of the Trinity, their tone of sentiment and language is different. The peals and the changes are then rung on other bells. *It is carnal reason; the pride of human reasoning; and the setting up of the feeble and darkened understanding of man above the truth and the holy word of God.* Your introduction, Sir, was employed on this very topic; and so was one of your inferences. And what, Sir, is the import and amount of this? Did you not *reason*, and *reason with all your might*, in that very discourse? It was, perhaps, the most argumentative sermon you ever wrote. You probably never gave a better example of your *logical strength*. The obvious *purpose of the discourse* was to sustain the doctrine *by argument*. And yet, both in the beginning and in the ending, you inveighed against the "pride of human reasoning." Did you, Sir, intend no more than to say, that Christians should receive the plain and unambiguous declarations of Scripture, *without reasoning against them?* No. I cordially unite with you. And in the use of this principle, the question of the Trinity, may, I think, soon be settled. For the following declarations are plain and unambiguous. "The Lord our God is one." "The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," "is the only living and true God." "To us there is one God the Father, and one Lord Jesus Christ," "the Mediator between God and man." But, Sir, you were not satisfied with the obvious import of these sacred passages. *And you reason against them.* You make a laboured argument to prove that the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is *not*, though it is expressly

declared that he is, the *only* true God. You maintain that he is one of the three equal persons in the Godhead.

And do you now reply, that it is proper and requisite *to compare* one passage of Scripture with another, *and to reason* from them? I grant it: we must do it. And let us not, for so doing, accuse, and rail at, each other.

Trinitarians, in regard to this thing, ought not to cast the first stone. They, certainly, *are not exceeded by their adversaries* in the employment of argumentative reasoning. And they have reasoned with uncommon abstruseness and subtilty: have drawn lines confessedly so fine as to be imperceptible to their own eyes: they have, as others think, assumed premises on presumption, and by attenuated logic, deduced inferences from them, of a very unsatisfactory and problematical character.

I recollect once hearing a Trinitarian minister discourse on the proceedings of the day of judgment. He earnestly insisted on *this* point; that *all the sins of the impenitent-wicked would, and must, then be revealed to the great assembly of mankind*, for otherwise the righteous, the heirs of salvation, *could not be satisfied that the punishment of them was proportionate and just!* Where, then, it may be asked, is their *confidence in the perfect wisdom and rectitude of God?* May not, and ought not, all intelligent beings to have an entire faith in the infallible equity of God, though the particular reasons of his dispensations are not made known? And as he hath set forth the Lord Jesus Christ, as the all-competent Saviour of them who receive and obey him, is it a mark of becoming humility, is it an act consistent with dutifulness, for us to say,—*that unless this Redeemer, divinely constituted, be truly and properly God, he is inadequate to the work, and we can put no trust in him?*

God hath pronounced the Lord Jesus Christ to be his own Son, invested with power over all flesh; able to give eternal life to as many as obey him. Therefore, though the natural character of the Son be what it may, *he is certainly adequate to the work of redemption.* For him hath God the Father sealed. If then, we receive the testimony of God concerning his Son, all doubt and disputation about his competency for the office he sustains is at once foreclosed. With what propriety, then, can a Christian say (and many have said it)—"Convince me that the Son is not equal to the Father, and I am destitute of the hope of eternal life." To say this, Sir, is it not to exalt human reason? And is it not to exalt it very

high? Did Dr. Priestley, Sir, with all his offensive temerity, ever stretch himself beyond this point of confidence in human reason? If I do not misremember, that fearless man once expressed a sentiment like the following; "If I knew that the Evangelist intended to affirm that the Son of Man existed in heaven before he was born upon earth, I should not decline to say, *that he must have laboured under some mistake.*" And the Rev. John Wesley declared, in substance, that "whatever language the Apostle Paul used on the subject of election, in the ninth chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, he could not have intended to advance what is now called *Calvinistic doctrine* of election and reprobation, because that doctrine is *false*, *blasphemous*, and *damnable*." These men, it is evident, placed no inconsiderable reliance on their own understanding, as to its office in the formation of their religious opinions; but I submit the question, Sir, whether they must not yield to that *Trinitarian* who undertakes to decide *à priori* and positively, *what it was expedient for God to do*, in order consistently to provide a way of salvation for mankind, and to pronounce the way which *He hath constituted*, unless based on the doctrine of a Divine Trinity, *inefficient: a manifest and an entire failure.*

One word more, Sir, in this connection. In your peroration, and near the close of it, having laid your hand on the Holy Book, and casting your eye around on the audience, with much expression in your manner, you said: "If the doctrine of the Trinity be not contained in this book, it has deceived me; it is unsafe for me to trust in its testimony; for what confidence can I have in its declarations on any subject, after it has deceived me upon one? My dear Sir, you must be under some mistake. *You never learned the doctrine of the Trinity from the Bible.* It is not the Sacred Volume that has deceived you, on the supposition that the doctrine, concerning which you then spake, be not true. It is not presumption in me to say this. Children who read the Bible, without the interference of commentaries, written or verbal, will imbibe sentiments of religion. But no one ever imbibed that of the Trinity. You Sir, would not have learned that doctrine, even at your present time of life, had you not read and heard Trinitarian discourses.

I well know a man, who when young was uncommonly addicted to the reading of the Scriptures. In a manner, the Bible was his manual day by day, from the time he rose in the morning to the hour when he lay down at night. And

he now distinctly recollects the first impression he ever had of what has long been considered *the true doctrine of the Trinity*. It was suggested by revolving in his mind that passage of the Catechism; "*These three are one God, the same in substance, and equal in power and in glory.*" He had never conceived the Son to be the true God, and equal to the Father. And his ideas of the Son had been taken from the New Testament. And the thought of the equality of the Divine Persons *greatly surprised him*, being totally different from what he had previously conceived. Still he had no disposition to reject or to doubt it, for he had equal confidence in the Catechism and in the Bible.

Though this fact, Sir, proves nothing in regard to the Trinity, whether the doctrine be true or false, yet it is not irrelevant to the inquiry; *from what source come our first conception and belief of the Three Co-equal Persons in the Godhead?* The strong presumption is that you, Sir, derived yours from the Assembly's Catechism. Can you, from distinct recollection, say that the fact is different? What impression would an unbiassed mind naturally receive from the following declarations: "This is my beloved Son." "Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him." "Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God and went to God." "As the Father hath given me commandment, even so I do." "I will pray the Father and he shall give you another Comforter." "The Father in me, he doeth the work." "My Father is greater than I."—Could any man, Sir, young or old, whose mind was unshackled, receive any other impression from these, and a hundred more similar passages, than that the Father was the *only true God*, and that the Son was *another* Being? And I will propose the question to you, Sir, *whether you do honestly believe that an enlightened man, reading the Bible over and over again, but receiving no religious communications from other sources, would come to the knowledge of distinct Persons, each of whom is equally the true God?* Will you venture to affirm? Q. P. O.

The Prosperity of its Societies the true Policy of a Sect.

The word *schism*, as used in the New Testament, relates to alienation of feeling rather than to difference of opinion. It is applied to the multitude in reference to Jesus. "There

was a division (schism) among the people on account of him;" i. e. our Lord, towards whom some of them were favourably disposed, while others were dissatisfied. It is applied to a particular church. "I hear there are divisions (schisms) among you." What constituted the union thus violated? Mutual love. "Their hearts were knit together in love." "Love," says Dr. Campbell (to whom we are indebted for the comment above), "was the criterion of Christian character, and the foundation of Christian unity. Mutual affection was the union; *alienation of heart* was the *schism.*" In later times the term *schism* has been appropriated to separation from communion in religious offices; and a *schismatic* regarded the same as a *separatist*, in respect to the ordinances of religion; but this is not the scriptural sense of the word.

"That there should be no schism in the body." "I hear there are divisions (schisms) among you." These passages relate to the same persons, and the same thing; the Corinthian church, and the animosities and discordant spirit of some of its members.

It is our present object to collect the light which the above and other testimonies of Scripture throw upon the following points, viz., the *distinctive character* and *obligations*, the *wants*, the *interests*, and the *policy* of a Christian Society.

Let it be remembered that the word *ecclesia*, translated church, signifies originally an assembly of any kind, and was applied in the New Testament to those who habitually met to worship in one place as Christians, not referring, however, as the word *church* very commonly does now, particularly to the communion of the Lord's supper, although it was anciently the custom of all believers, without distinction, to partake in this ordinance; the young being admitted to it after a certain age, and after going through a course of instruction in the Christian faith. By the word *ecclesia* in the New Testament is to be understood therefore, a regularly organized Christian assembly or society. The distinction between the church and the congregation was of later origin. "As soon as in any place converts were found sufficient to form a society or church, a bishop or presbyter was ordained for life to minister to them."* "The two terms," (bishop and presbyter,) says Mosheim, "were undoubtedly applied to the same order of men. The churches, thus constituted, formed a sort of federative body of independent, religious communities, dis-

* Library of Useful Knowledge.

persed through the greater part of the empire, in continual communication, and in constant harmony with each other."* This state of things is said to have continued until "towards the end of the second century." Such were the first or primitive churches, to which the Congregational societies of modern times bear a nearer resemblance, in the matter of form, than any other.

Christians thus associated, or forming a church, not only belonged to the body of Christ, but were a distinct community of themselves; the obligations arising in such a community being recognised by the apostolic writers, and much of the preceptive and admonitory parts of the Epistles being founded upon them. This marks an important distinction. There were some relations and duties extending to the body of Christ, the whole new Israel of God, to which all the Christian societies in common belonged; and there were other relations and duties having their origin and end in the church or society with which the individual was particularly connected. This is what we mean by the *distinctive* character of a Christian society. The disciples of Christ were indeed taught to regard no child of Adam as unclean, or as having no claim to their good offices, but they were exhorted to be the most abundant in them where opportunity the most favoured; they were to do good to all men, but especially to those who were of the household of faith; they were to work no man evil, but they were to edify one another. As members of a Christian society they were entreated to be "like-minded," having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind; that is, joined not in opinion, but in heart, and minding one thing, having each the same object in view, the great interests of the soul, and the honour of Christ. Such a spirit would secure them from doing anything "through strife or vain glory," "with murmurings and disputings," and would lead them, agreeably to their Master's spirit, "in lowliness of mind to esteem one another better than themselves," and thus, as, in their circumstances, peculiarly became them, to be "blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom they would then shine as lights in the world, holding forth," both in word and behaviour, "the doctrine of eternal life." Virtues were specified corresponding to the relations of such a society, and essential to its prosperity and utility in

* History of the Church, part I.

the world. The same relations and the same duties belong to Christian societies at the present day; a remark which suggests the importance of discriminating between *societies* and *sects*—a view which we would now recommend to particular attention.

The interests of a sect and those of the societies which it comprises, do by no means coincide. Those of the former are comparatively of little importance. The tie which binds together the members of a sect, as such, is a similarity of opinion and taste which they naturally wish, and perhaps unitedly endeavour, to spread in the world; but the members of a society, though a collection of those among whom such a similarity exists, have closer bonds and higher interests, than they who are associated simply on that ground. By a religious society is meant, that "a number of persons of a similar way of thinking, and for no other purpose than merely to enjoy to the greatest advantage their own tastes and opinions in religion, associate to form a congregation." That, as a society, they are to be completely distinguished, in some respects, and those the most important, from the sect or denomination to which they may belong, is clear from the consideration that they would still be a society, bound by all the obligations thereunto pertaining, even supposing that they belonged to no sect, and that there were no other such society in the world. "Religion to them is a personal affair, unconnected with other interests, and their only motive in associating in it at all, is that they find a duty or advantage in social worship, which compels them to adopt means for its performance."

The New Testament, then, let it be repeated, recognises distinct religious societies, not historically only, acknowledging them by name in letters addressed to them or in accounts referring to them, but also by implication, by giving rules applicable only to those who live together in such a connection, holding with each other habitual intercourse, exerting a mutual influence, and having one interest in common, one great end in view. They were "to edify one another," "to have the same care one for another," "to bear each other's burdens," and "to mind the same thing," or contribute, each according to his ability, to the common object for which they became associated; all of which implies specific duties growing out of their connection, and not capable of being exercised toward those living at a distance, with whom they were unconnected or only remotely allied. As members of a Chris-

tian society they had duties as distinct from those which they owed to the universal church, as a man's duties to his own family are from those which he owes to the community at large. Such then is the *distinctive character* of a Christian society, out of which arise, as we have seen, its peculiar *obligations*.

What are the *wants* of such a society? The object of such a society is not to increase the numbers of blind followers of a name or doctrine, but to provide for the wants of those thus associated. The real wants of the society correspond with the most important wants of the individuals which compose it. They are permanent and universal; they are such as are felt by all the members of all sects, and which it is the great design of Christianity to provide for,—the undying wants of the soul; for which the provision of Christianity is applied to the best advantage in proportion as more feel practically the power of the gospel, are interested that others should feel it in like manner, and coöperate in making it felt by an exemplary support and observance of the institutions of the gospel, which were intended to give action to its power, and to exhibit illustration of its value. The support of a society, therefore, is a nobler object than the advancement of the sect to which it belongs. It is worthy of the warmest sympathy, and gives scope to the purest zeal. It is the promotion of man's highest interests, to which indeed the triumphs of a sect may be subservient, but with which the true interests of a society precisely accord. Consequently, one who does not feel a lively interest in the ministrations, or a full acquiescence in the tenets of a society, may consistently give it aid, particularly if he have as yet no decided persuasion on disputed points, or is so situated that he cannot attend worship in the form which he prefers.

The *interests* of a society, as well as its wants, are distinct from those of the sect with which it is connected. Those wants and interests correspond to each other. It is the great interest of a society to have its most important wants supplied. What then are those interests? What would be the leading interests of a religious society if it stood alone in the world; if it were the first or the only religious community founded upon the Christian faith? To have religion preached, felt, and practised, "as entitled to our reverence because it is true, because it provides the most effectual support under the evils of life, and because it affords the most powerful aid to morality." It is for such reasons principally, that we should re-

spect and value it, seek its help, extend its influence, and perpetuate its institutions which, in some form, are common to all sects, and in each are designed to promote personal or practical religion. For our own, our neighbour's, and our children's sake we should appreciate this great concern of society and the soul; for the religious character of our descendants will take a colour from our own, and the Christian prosperity of those who are to come after us will bear a proportion to our exertions.

The interests of a religious society, it has been already observed, are to be distinguished from those of the sect to which it belongs. The sect may be growing while the society is stationary or decreasing; and, on the other hand, a society may be steadfast and flourishing, while the sect with which it is connected is declining. Accordingly that which advances the progress of a sect does not necessarily promote the welfare of a society. You may encourage the publications, the agencies, or the policy of your sect, but this of itself does little or nothing toward the growth of your society. The interest of the latter is not so much to have the numbers increased of those who adopt its opinions, as to have provision made for the wants of its own members. The clergyman is most truly serving the interests of his society, not when he is aiding measures in which all of his sect, all Christians, or all mankind, are concerned, but when he is sowing in the hearts of his customary hearers, the seed which is to be fruitful in the blessings of personal religion to them and theirs.

There is much danger at the present day of confounding together the interests and the prospects of a sect and its societies; interests and prospects in the most important respects distinct, and not to be blended without mischievous consequences. Sects have their periods of commencement, growth, and decline, and their stages of enthusiasm, of reason and examination, and of indifference; but there is no basis for corresponding steps and courses in the constitution of religious societies. The latter have permanent interests, not affected by the storms of controversy or the tides of popular feeling, and may be enlarging their numbers when their respective sects are contracting their bounds, just as domestic ties may be strengthened and multiplied amid the conflicts of party division, or as particular towns may flourish during a period when the government to which they belong has undergone a revolution, or the very soil on which they are built has changed masters. So, on the other hand, a sect may be ex-

panding itself when particular societies attached to it have been shrinking through the indifference or discord of their respective members. The truth may mightily prevail, may fill the land, and unite in faith the majority of mankind, while some society, built upon it, has not been able, from negligence or division, to keep itself in existence. It follows that those who may have become indifferent to speculative distinctions or to party contests, even if they could justify indifference to truth on this ground, cannot thereby excuse themselves from the duty of promoting the prosperity of the societies with which they may be connected. Whether the doctrinal views of a society are right or wrong, their importance overrated or not, their nature understood or vilified, their progress rapid or slow, the wants of the soul remain unaltered, the interests of a religious society unchangeably correspond to them, and unalterable too are the obligations of all its members to love, sustain, and edify one another.

What then is the *policy* of a religious society? Its true policy is to study and apply the means of building itself up in the beauty of Christian holiness. It does not lie in contributing to the progress of the sect in whose bosom it is embraced; although this is a duty, and not to be overlooked. That which advances the religious respectability and prosperity of a society is its true policy. The first requisite, therefore, is for its members to learn to direct their chief efforts to their own welfare, and on their own labours and sacrifices to build their expectations. Societies are prone to take a different view of the subject. They look *abroad* for growth instead of *at home*, to others and not to themselves. The principles of prosperity are within them; and the true secret of strength is not to contrive measures for large accessions on a sudden, but to provide for securing that progressive increase and influence which time promises to patient exertion and established character. But we are apt to build our hopes too much on changes without from sectarian or general efforts, and from that approach to each other which follows the clearer light jointly shed on the field of dispute by the parties in a controversy. We look for the enlargement of our numbers rather from the correctness of our creed, than the attraction of our example, from the fair show which the truth makes in argument, rather than from the more winning manifestations of its practical value. The complaint that more frequent additions are not made to the church, comes from persons who are not themselves just enough to the truth, to confess it before men.

Murmurs about the thinness of the congregation are heard from those who care not themselves enough for the Sabbath and the sanctuary to attend worship, if they can find a cause to detain them at home in some trifling excuse which they have not made too often to be ashamed of. They are loud in proclaiming the dullness of the preacher, which they have done all that indifference could do to increase, and which may be owing in part to his being obliged, through their irregular attendance and its example, so often to address himself to empty seats.

The active interest of individuals in their several societies is not to be governed by the varying fortunes of their sect. It is not to be relaxed when the cause apparently prospers, as if they were sure of advancing with it in the same proportion; nor is it to be discouraged when the cause labours, as if the interests of the society must therefore labour too. The springs of prosperity are in each case distinct, and the prospects in each are different. The true wants of a society, being invariable and perpetual, require the untiring endeavours of its members. Unity of purpose in promoting the great design of the gospel, is a steady principle of action, a principle of stability as well as of growth, by means of which, whether the general interests of a sect be advancing, or retrograde, or stationary, its societies may remain steadfast, and each independent community add at length the advantages of establishments to the improvements adopted in the beginning from the freedom of sects.

Though we have occupied so much space in explaining what has seemed to us to be the distinctive character, the obligations, the wants, the interests, and the policy of Christian societies, we must be permitted to advert, as briefly as possible, to the consequences of indifference and the call for exertion. In all liberal societies at the present day there is a demand for singleness of purpose and unity of effort. No zeal, no eloquence, could preserve or prosper a discordant people. The Apostles laid down no principle more plainly than that the welfare of the church is grounded in love. Liberal societies cannot compete with others formed on stricter principles of church polity, and entertaining different views of Christian influence, either in mere zeal for peculiar doctrines, or in the machinery of popular excitement. They must depend on other means. They must recur to the true principles of social prosperity. Each society must be in earnest to use its own resources for its own benefit to the utmost extent

possible. A new society in a divided community, or one in a minority, may be contented with maintaining its ground, or with advancing slowly. Even this may require a strong, a determined, and unremitting effort, in which all the members should cordially unite. It is a great mistake to think that nothing is wanting but to let things take their own course. The system of protracted meetings is alone enough to show that if liberal societies have sometimes sustained themselves without any extraordinary union of effort, it is not because there is not united zeal and concentrated power which may be inflamed and wielded at will against them. The new force above mentioned will be applied at intervals, until its novelty is worn out, with prodigious effect upon those who come incautiously within the sweep of its current, which in its irresistible progress awes the timid, warps round the worldly and calculating, sucks in the thoughtless and presumptuous, and besides the ignorant and weak, sometimes hurries away the judicious and firm, unawares drawn passively along, and unconscious perhaps of their compulsory movement, and of the cause. If this system should in any case happen to operate unfavourably upon us, we have nothing similar to oppose to it. When this at length shall fail, other machinery will be invented, but *we* shall invent none to counterwork it. *Our* trust must be in applying the principles of true and lasting prosperity. As members of religious societies we must make up by individual disinterestedness and zeal, consistency and usefulness, for the want of fuel for popular heat, and of the weight accumulated by acting uniformly in masses. Our societies, in fine, should cultivate mental and moral independence, a disposition to make truth and right their constant guide, that they may be enabled to follow a conscientious course, and adhere to a wise and steady policy, neither disheartened by disappointments and delays, nor shaken by the apprehension of suffering for the sake of truth and conscience. Their members should coöperate, both by liberality of expenditure, and unity of spirit; each giving for necessary or useful purposes in proportion to his ability, and that proportion in each instance a part of a liberal estimate; each cultivating a spirit of harmony and good will, sustained by a unity of purpose, founded on a conviction of the momentous importance of their common wants, and the coincidence of their real interests, on their common obligations to God and to each other, to the present and the coming generations.

A Christian minister has indeed a weighty responsibility,

but so likewise has a Christian people. A society acting upon such principles as have now been urged, might hope to prosper, if the Apostles understood what Christian prosperity is; acting contrary to them, it must inevitably decline and cease to be fruitful, though it should have yearly a new Paul to plant, and a new Apollos to water.

Although in some points of view the interests of a society and a sect are separate (without being opposite,) and those of the former far outweigh in importance those of the latter, yet they act reciprocally upon each other; and although a single society may go to decay while the sect to which it belongs continues to grow, yet it is plain that no sect could be flourishing while all its societies were falling away; consequently, notwithstanding the distinction that we have kept in sight between them, we may draw the conclusion, that to advance the prosperity of its Societies is the policy of a Sect.

T. R. Sullivan.

The Unitarian Heresy.

We cannot say when, or by whom the practice was first introduced into the world, of so abusing the Scripture term "heresy," as to make it mean "an unsound system of belief,"—and of so misapplying the Scripture term "heretic," as to make it denote "one who holds an erroneous opinion." It is quite certain that such definitions are not to be found in the Apostolic Dictionary. The man must have been himself a heretic, in the true sense, that sense which we shall presently unfold, who first perverted so strangely the language of the Bible.

These and other similar reflections were suggested to us when we were reading sometime since a passage from a distinguished transatlantic writer, in which he is pleased to designate Unitarianism as a "puny heresy." If the author meant to say merely that the Unitarians constitute but a "small sect," he was right, comparatively speaking, in regard to the fact—and used in a proper sense the term heresy. But the whole strain of the writer's remarks in the context forbids us to interpret him so favourably. All that he says about the "meagre phantom," the "pitiful shadow," the "spectre," forces us to believe that the thinness of the Uni-

tarian ranks constituted in his mind a grand argument against the Unitarian system. If he had not regarded it as a *puny* heresy, he would not have called it a heresy *at all.* But we would ask if there may not be a gigantic heresy as well as a dwarfish heresy? We think, in the true apostolic sense, there may be. It seems to us that the author's *implied* argument (no man of note would venture to express it openly), that because Unitarianism is the system of comparatively few, therefore it is a heresy in the invidious sense,—it seems to us that this argument is like the reasoning of the child, that a copper cent is worth more than a silver sixpence because it is bigger. Is this the way in which men are to judge of the comparative value and truth of systems!

But this author is not alone in the view in which we quote him. From the earliest times the system of the *majority* has generally been looked up to and *looked down from* as orthodoxy, and every deviation from it as so much heresy. At its birth men called Unitarianism heresy, in order if possible to frighten it to death. As it grew up to childhood and youth they still repeated the cry in order to warn the world against its power.

We have not of late heard Unitarianism *called* heresy, but there are still many who regard and dread it as such; and we have thought it might be useful, for the sake of Unitarians as well as of others, to inquire what heresy really is,—what the Apostles considered it,—who are heretics,—and how we may know whether the charge of heresy is or is not applicable to ourselves.

When it is said, then, that Unitarianism is a heresy—what is meant? A reproach? Paul did not think to condemn himself when, on his defence before Agrippa, he professed to have adhered faithfully to the strictest sect (literally heresy) of his religion. The word cannot be applied *invidiously* on the authority of Paul. The utmost that can be made of the charge, on the strength of his language, is that the Unitarians constitute a sect. And so do the Trinitarians constitute a sect. No harm then, surely, can be intended by calling any body of men whatever a *heresy* in the proper sense of language.

But is it meant that the *system of opinions and principles* on which the heresy or sect is built constitutes the members of the sect heretical and that thus the Unitarians are heretics, and accordingly must be classed among those whom Paul in the tenth verse of his third chapter to Titus directs him to

admonish and, if incorrigible, to reject? It seems to us that this conclusion also is authorized neither by the language of the Apostles, nor by what we know of the practice of the church in the apostolic age. Read the verse following the one already referred to. "Knowing that he that is such (a heretic) is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself." Does this sound like the description of one whose only fault is an error in opinion? Does it not apply more exactly to one who has violated in some way the *spirit* of Christianity? We think so and shall presently define the word "heretic" accordingly. But we said also, that the view we are opposing could not be justified by an appeal to the practice of the apostolic churches. On this subject indeed little has been handed down to us on which we can rely,—but we know nothing to make it improbable, and much to make it probable that there were, even then, differences of opinion on secondary matters—minor modifications of doctrine—yet all held and tolerated in "one spirit"—and that, the very opposite of the spirit of heresy.

When we say "the *spirit* of heresy," we anticipate the view we are next to present of the Apostle's meaning,—a view not new, nor peculiar to ourselves, but one, nevertheless, which we consider important to be kept in mind and in heart by Unitarians and by every denomination of Christians. We understand, then, Paul to mean by "heretic" a man of heretical disposition (not merely of wrong *opinions*),—a man in whom is the *spirit* of heresy,—the spirit of *sect*. Wakefield, we think, defines the word rightly, "a fomenter of divisions." It has nothing to do with the truth or falsity of any doctrine, but only with the spirit in which that doctrine is held or urged. Milton says "a man may be a heretic in the truth; and if he believe things only because his pastor says so, or the assembly so determines, without knowing other reason, though his belief be true, yet the very truth he holds becomes his heresy." Now, though we think there are other more natural manifestations of the spirit of heresy than those to which Milton alludes, some of which we shall directly notice, yet we agree with him most fully in the principle that the quality denoted by the word *heretical* is a quality of *disposition* and not of *doctrine*. What then, let us ask, are some of the elements of the spirit of heresy,—and what some of the prominent modes of its manifestation?

In the first place, then, the spirit of heresy is a proud spirit. In all ages of the world sectaries who agreed, perhaps, after

all, in doctrines of essential importance, have persecuted each other for differences in the manner of looking at those doctrines. Was the relation of God to Christ the subject? Men who agreed that Christ was a moral manifestation of the Deity have pronounced each other heretics because they could not agree upon the question *how* the manifestation was made. Each has been too proud to meet the other on the common ground,—and therefore they have either haughtily stood apart each on his own little spot, or they have battled each for the peculiar spot of the other. Was the relation of Jesus Christ to mankind the subject? Men who agreed in the great truth that Christ died for us, and who might have agreed in gratitude for his love, have yet chosen to persecute each other as heretics, because, according to one party, Christ paid literally a price for us, and, according to the other, he saved us by means of a religion which he died to establish. Is this the evidence of Christian humility,—of that gratitude which becomes finite beings who have received an infinite favour? Does it not rather betoken a selfish, spiritual pride, of the same nature with that temporal pride which makes a man think more of the small distinctions of rank or fortune than of those great blessings which he enjoys in common with others? Is not then the spirit of heresy, which makes men value more their peculiar modifications of doctrine than the great doctrine itself which they hold in common with others,—is not such a spirit the opposite of Christian humility?

Again, the spirit of heresy is a spirit of opposition,—of contradiction,-—of dissension,—of denial. The thorough heretic lives upon opposition. His element is dissension. Imagine a perfect heretic, that is, one who is perfectly imbued with the spirit of heresy, and you have an idea of the embodied principle of evil. Goëthe, in his Faust, well calls the spirits of darkness, the *denying* spirits. We need not add that the spirit of heresy is a factious—a party spirit.

If such, then, be the spirit of heresy it is no light thing to call any man or any body of men heretical. Do the Unitarians deserve the reproach? We have seen, we must confess, the case of a church, recently separated from the Orthodox body, in which the animating principle seemed to partake too much of the spirit of opposition, of heresy,—but we have seen other churches pursuing, though a positive, yet a peaceful course. Certainly the Unitarian system is not a system of negations, whatever may be said of the spirit in which its principles have been sometimes held and urged. Unitarian-

ism embraces the great truths of the gospel. But, whether it be the truth or not is of little consequence compared with another question, and that is, are Unitarians actuated by the spirit of truth. This is something for which all of us, of whatever sect or name, ought to strive and pray more earnestly and fervently than for even truth itself. A man may not know when he has the true *doctrine*, but he may know whether he have the *spirit* of truth or the spirit of heresy.

Unitarians, especially, ought to think of this,—their system is considered heresy. Let them not justify the charge by holding their faith in a mere spirit of opposition. Let them not imagine that, because true, it will necessarily triumph. The spirit of heresy can only be weakness, and even truth maintained in such a spirit may be worse than weak. "If any man have not the spirit of Christ he is none of his." But what is the spirit of Christ? It is that spirit which in his last solemn farewell to his disciples, our Saviour promised to give them,—that spirit which he said the world could not receive,—the spirit of truth. Here lies, after all, the strength of Unitarianism,—the strength of the church. The genius of heresy has reigned long enough in Christendom. It has done more harm to the cause of our religion than the open attacks of outward foes. The public history of Christianity seems like a history of rival heresies. Some are accustomed to look upon the smaller sects as the heretics. We see as much of the heretical spirit in one party as in another, in the majority as in the minority,—only it manifests itself differently in the two. In the larger party it is usually spiritual tyranny,—in the smaller, spiritual rebellion. It is time such a spirit should give way to the spirit of truth, which casteth out the spirit of heresy. It is time men should study and labour not merely *against error*, but for truth. If Unitarians would refute the charge of heresy, let them silently show forth the truth they believe in their lives and characters. There lies the only true test of the heretic or the Christian.

We trust that the Unitarians are becoming more and more a *positive* sect. We do not say that we hope *Unitarianism* is becoming more and more a positive *system*, because we believe it has always held to the grand facts of the Bible. But we do wish to see Unitarian *men* every day becoming more and more possessed with the positive progressive spirit of truth. We wish to see them in the true catholic spirit, taking their stand upon the grand central truths of the Bible,—striving to establish in themselves and others the ground-principles

of Christianity, and to breathe the spirit of the truth as it is in Jesus,—and thus doing their part towards ejecting that demon of heresy which has so long tyrannized over heavenly truth. C. T. Brooks.

Letters to Unbelievers.

No. V.

RELIGIOUS BELIEF OF BENJAMIN FRANKLIN.

Fellow Citizens,

Your attention is now invited to an examination of the religious opinions of Benjamin Franklin. You claim him as an unbeliever. I have examined all his published writings, and discover that your claims are altogether unfounded. The evidence in support of this assertion I shall present in his own words. I shall quote from his life which he wrote in his old age and left unfinished; and also from his private letters and public documents.

I suppose that all who have read the life of Franklin know that he was a deist in the former part of his life. He afterwards embraced Christianity and died a Christian. After I have shown you from his own words, that he embraced the gospel, and endeavoured to conform to its precepts, I will show you how he became a deist in early life, and what influence infidelity had on him, and how he condemned it as injurious.

The Rev. Dr. Stiles, President of Yale College, wrote a letter to Dr. Franklin in the last years of his life. He requested to know Franklin's views of religion. I will give you a short extract from his truly liberal letter. These are the words of Dr. Stiles.

"You know, sir, that I am a Christian, and would to heaven that all others were such as I am, except my imperfections and deficiencies of moral character. As much as I know of Dr. Franklin, I have not an idea of his religious sentiments. I wish to know the opinion of my venerable friend concerning Jesus of Nazareth. He will not impute this to *impertinence*, or improper curiosity, in one, who for so many years has continued to love, estimate, and reverence his abilities and literary character, with an ardour and affection bordering on adoration. If I have said too much let the request be blotted out, and be no more; and

yet I shall never cease to wish you that happy immortality, which I believe Jesus alone has purchased for the virtuous and truly good of every religious denomination in Christendom, and for those of every age, nation, and mythology, who reverence the Deity, are filled with integrity, righteousness, and benevolence." —*Works*, Vol. VI. p. 240.

This is a plain question. Do you think Franklin will give an explicit answer, with his usual honesty and frankness? Or do you suppose he will evade it, either partially or wholly? Listen to his reply.

"You desire to know something of my religion. It is the first time I have been questioned upon it. But I cannot take your curiosity amiss, and shall endeavour in a few words to gratify it. Here is my creed. I believe in one God, the Creator of the universe. That he governs it by his Providence. That he ought to be worshipped. That the most acceptable service we can render to him is doing good to his other children. That the soul of man is immortal, and will be treated with justice in another life respecting its conduct in this. These I take to be the fundamental points in all sound religion, and I regard them as you do in whatever sect I meet with them. As to Jesus of Nazareth, my opinion of whom you particularly desire, I thing the system of morals and his religion, as he left them to us, the best the world ever saw or is likely to see; but I apprehend it has received various corrupting changes, and I have, with most of the present dissenters in England, some doubts as to his divinity; though it is a question I do not dogmatize upon, having never studied it, and think it needless to busy myself with it now, when I expect soon an opportunity of knowing the truth with less trouble."—*Works*, Vol. VI. pp. 241, 242.

I should think this statement would be sufficiently definite to satisfy the most skeptical inquirer. Franklin expressed his firm belief in Christianity in a letter to an orthodox minister. He rejected the additions and corruptions of this holy religion which had been embodied in human creeds and fallible systems of divinity. He doubted the divinity of Christ like the Unitarians with whom he had associated in England. Were I called upon to state the leading articles of my Christian faith, I should be willing to adopt the same language with no single exception. Instead of expressing doubts respecting the divinity of Jesus, I should affirm that I had studied the question, and rejected the Orthodox notion on this subject altogether. I believe in the divinity of his mission and of his doctrines but

not in the divinity of his person. These views of religion were believed and practised for many years, as I will now show from his writings.

Franklin stated in the last quotation that God ought to be worshipped. I will now present you his views respecting prayer. My first extract is from a letter to his sister. These are his words.

"You express yourself as if you thought I was against worshipping God. I am so far from thinking that God is not to be worshipped, that I have composed and wrote a whole book of devotions for my own use."—*Works*, Vol. VI. p. 5.

I will give one specimen from those parts of his devotions which are still preserved. The following may serve as an example.

"Inasmuch as by reason of our ignorance we cannot be certain that many things which we often hear mentioned in the petitions of men to the Deity, would prove real goods if they were in our possession, and as I have reason to hope and believe that the goodness of my *heavenly Father* will not withhold from me a suitable share of temporal blessings, if by a *virtuous* and *holy* life I conciliate his favor and kindness; therefore I presume not to ask such things, but rather humbly and with a sincere heart express my earnest desire that he would graciously assist my continual endeavours and resolutions of eschewing vice and embracing virtue; which kind of supplication will at the same time remind me in a solemn manner of my extensive duty."

"That I may be preserved from Atheism, impiety, and profaneness; and in my addresses to Thee carefully avoid irreverence and ostentation, formality and odious hypocrisy, help me, O Father."

"That I may refrain from calumny and detraction; that I may may abhor and avoid deceit and envy, fraud, flattery, and hatred, malice, lying and ingratitude, help me, O Father.

"That I may be sincere in friendship, faithful in trust, and impartial in judgment, watchful against pride and anger, help me, O Father."

"That I may be just in all my dealings, temperate in my pleasures, full of candour and ingenuousness, humanity and benevolence, help me, O Father."

"That I may be grateful to my benefactors, and generous to my friends, exercising charity and liberality to the poor, and piety to the miserable, help me, O Father."

"That I may possess integrity and evenness of mind, resolution in difficulties, and fortitude under affliction; that I may be punctual in performing my promises, peaceable and prudent in my behaviour, help me, O Father."

"That I may have tenderness for the weak, and reverent respect for the ancient; that I may be kind to my neighbours, good natured to my companions, and hospitable to strangers, help me, O Father."

"That I may be averse to craft and overreaching, abhor extortion, perjury, and every kind of wickedness, help me, O Father."

"That I may be honest and open-hearted, gentle merciful, and good, cheerful in spirit, rejoicing in the good of others, help me, O Father."

"That I may have a constant regard to honor and probity, that I may possess a perfect innocence and a good conscience, and at length become truly virtuous and magnanimous, help me good God, help me, O Father. And forasmuch as ingratitude is one of the most odious vices, let me not be unmindful gratefully to acknowledge the favours I receive from heaven."—*Works*, Vol. V. pp. 8–10. English edition.

Dr. Franklin not only practised daily secret devotion, but he was in favor of public prayer. The following speech in the Convention for the adoption of the Constitution of the United States will confirm my statement.

"Mr. President,

"The small progress we have made after four or five weeks close attendance and continual reasonings with each other, our different sentiments on almost every question, several of the last producing as many noes as ayes, is methinks a melancholy proof of the imperfection of the human understanding. We indeed seem to *feel* our want of political wisdom, since we have been running all about in search of it. We have gone back to ancient history for models of government, and examined the different forms of those republics, which, having been originally formed with the seeds of their own dissolution, now no longer exist; and we have viewed modern states all around Europe, but find none of their constitutions suitable to our circumstances. In this situation of this assembly, groping as it were in the dark, to find political truth, and scarce able to distinguish it when presented to us, how has it appened, Sir, that we have not hitherto once thought of humbly applying to the Father of Lights to illuminate our understandings? In the beginning of the contest with Britain, when we were sensible of danger, we had daily prayers in this room for the Divine direction. Our prayers, Sir, were heard; and they were graciously answered. All of us who were engaged in the struggle, must have observed frequent instances of a superintending Providence in our favour. To that kind Providence we owe this happy opportunity of consulting in peace on the means of establishing our future national felicity. And have we now forgotten that powerful Friend?

Or do we imagine we no longer need His assistance? I have lived, Sir, a long time; and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth. *That God governs in the affairs of men.* And if a sparrow connot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid? We have been assured, Sir, in the sacred writings, that except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it. I firmly believe this; and I also believe that with out His concurring aid, we shall succeed in this political building no better than the builders of Babel. We shall be divided by our little partial, local interests; our projects will be confounded, and we ourselves shall become a reproach and a byeword down to future ages. And what is worse, mankind may hereafter, from this unfortunate instance, despair of establishing government by human wisdom, and leave it to chance, war, and conquest. I beg leave to move that henceforth prayers, imploring the assistance of Heaven and its blessings on our deliberations, be held in this assembly every morning before we proceed to business; and that one or more of the clergy of this city be requested to officiate in that service."—*Life and Works*, first English edition, Vol. I. p. 389.

These are noble sentiments. They are worthy of the distinguished statesman and philosopher by whom they were uttered. They do honour to his head and his heart. They serve to stamp the name of Christian upon his character. Spoken in such a manner, at such an age, before such an assembly, they entitle him to the respect of all the followers of Jesus. And when the skepticism and fanaticism of the present period shall have passed, this speech will be regarded as one of the brightest gems in his crown of earthly glory. Observe too how far removed are the sentiments of this speech from those expressed by modern unbelievers! As far removed as light is from darkness.

Dr. Franklin entertained rational views respecting the Scriptures. The following extract from a letter to a Unitarian friend will furnish you with his opinions respecting the Old Testament.

"Understanding that my letter intended for you was lost, I take this opportunity to give you the purport of it as well as I can recollect. I agreed with you in sentiments respecting the Old Testament; and thought the clause in our constitutions, which required the members of assembly to declare their belief, that the *whole* of it was given by divine inspiration, had better have been omitted. That I had opposed the clause; but being overpowered by numbers, and fearing more might in future

times be grafted on it, I prevailed to have the additional clause, that no further or more extended profession of faith should ever be exacted. So much for that letter, to which I may now add, that there are several things in the Old Testament, impossible to be given by *divine* inspiration; such as the approbation ascribed to the angel of the Lord, of that abominably wicked and detestable action of Jael, the wife of Heber, the Kenite. If the rest of the book were like that, I should rather suppose it given by inspiration from another quarter, and renounce the whole." —*Works*, Vol. VI. p. 155.

These remarks manifest that discrimination which ought ever to be made respecting the Hebrew Scriptures. The cause of religion has been greatly injured by the writings of unwise believers. They have asserted most roundly that the whole of the Old Testament was given by divine inspiration. They could not produce a particle of satisfactory proof in support of their position, while there existed an abundance of internal evidence to the contrary. Such high claims for these ancient writings have induced superficial reasoners to reject the whole as fictitious stories. Franklin had too much candour and judgment to pursue so credulous a course. His notions were correct as some further extracts will fully discover. The following passages may serve as a specimen.

"A zealous advocate for the proposed federal constitution in a public assembly said, that the repugnance of a great part of mankind to good government was such, that he believed, that if an angel from heaven was to bring down a constitution, formed there for our use, it would nevertheless meet with violent opposition. He was reproved for the supposed extravagance of the sentiment, and he did not justify it. Probably it might not have immediately occurred to him, that the experiment had been tried, and that the event was recorded in the *most faithful of all histories, the Holy Bible*; otherwise he might, as it seems to me, have supported his opinion by that *unexceptionable authority*."

"It appears that the Israelites were a people jealous of their newly acquired liberty, which jealousy was in itself no fault; but that, when they suffered it to be worked upon by artful men, pretending public good, with nothing really in view but private interest, they were led to oppose the establishment of the new constitution, whereby they brought upon themselves much inconvenience and misfortune. It further appears, from the same *inestimable history*, that when, after many ages, the constitution had become old and much abused, and an amendment of it was proposed, the populace, as they had accused Moses of the ambition of making himself a prince, and cried out, stone him! stone

him! so excited by their high priests and scribes, they exclaimed against the Messiah, that he aimed at becoming king of the Jews, and cried, crucify him! crucify him!"—*Works*, Vol. V. pp. 428. 431. B. WHITMAN.

[To be concluded in our next.]

Considerations for Philosophical Rejecters of the Christian Faith.

PERHAPS no assertion is more commonly set forth by the organs of infidelity than that the Christian religion cannot bear the test of close intellectual examination. It is continually said that when the eye of *reason* is fixed upon its character and claims, all its disguises are pierced, all its falsity is exposed, and all the arguments by which it has been supported, stand out in the shameful nakedness of detected imposture. It is affirmed that clouded intellects alone can fail to perceive the broad fallacies that spoil its proofs, and weak minds alone consent to serve its cause. For the purpose perhaps of covering this last position, it is sometimes even pretended that when respectable intellects do enlist themselves in its service, they most grossly and knowingly impose on the common mind, and basely promote their own selfish interests by tributes extorted from the superstitious agonies and fears of their fellow-men.

In reply to such statements,—statements which excite our deepest amazement when they first come to our knowledge,—we need only point to the CHRISTIAN MIND, such as it has been and is, and such as it surely will continue to be so long as the *human* mind shall exist. Milton, and Newton, and Locke, when charged with hypocrisy, need no defence. It is needless to attempt the proof of anything so notoriously true as that Christianity has been welcomed as a visitant from heaven by the greatest minds to which her claims have been addressed. It is also true that, wherever her character has been understood, she has exercised her salutary control over the wide extent of the common mind. And we would have the philosophical unbeliever observe that a two-fold argument results hence in favour of our religion. It is no small argument in support of Christianity that her claims have been tested and admitted by those minds which have occupied the very

highest rank, while no mind of the *first* order has ever opposed those claims. To our own mind this argument has great force, and the more it is dwelt upon the more powerful does it appear. Still, it is not often insisted upon, and Christianity, in the multitude of her almost innumerable proofs, can well dispense with it. Yet Christianity is welcomed also by the common mind,—by weak minds, if the unbeliever will so express it. Thus Christianity, in this two-fold confirmation of its truth, is shown to be suited to the soul of man, to the universal mind. The highest intellect acknowledges its truth, the humblest soul feels its power. The *principles of human nature* thus offer their testimony that Christianity is from God. And why is this homage paid? Not only because the facts of our religion are historically true, and thus Christ is proved to have been a teacher come from God by the experience of the world,—*experience*, that idol to which infidel reasoners have so long paid homage,—but because Christianity has presented to the soul those *spiritual realities* upon which it can place its dependence, as the body rests itself upon the solid ground of this material globe. We place upon Jesus of Nazareth our faith and hope, not only because he did wondrous works, which no man could do unless God were with him, but because he appears to us as the Sun of Righteousness, revealing to the view of our minds the objects of the celestial world, just as the light of the sun in the heavens discloses mountain, river, and ocean to the organ of vision.

While the proof that Christianity is from heaven is thus embodied in facts that have happened on the earth, while the highest and purest reason assents to its claim, and the heart of man puts forth its eloquent appeal in its behalf, we may be surprised to hear of its being rejected after a philosophical examination. It is our object to explain how this happens. We do not in fact think it surprising. A little reflection will show how easily Christianity may be rejected, by him who *wishes* to reject it, after a plausible *show* of right reasoning and philosophy. We mean to say, and we shall attempt to show, that in the examination of Christianity there is room for the *dishonesty* of argument and philosophy. We can very well conceive of the mind that would be prepared to make those statements with which we commenced, relating to the intellectual character of the advocates of Christian truth. And we wish to describe, in various particulars, the dishonesty of such a mind, after we have first stated in general terms the opportunity there is found in the character of Christianity for

its dishonest action. Our two objects then are these. 1. We wish to bring into view that character of Christianity by which, though its evidences are so exceedingly numerous and weighty, it furnishes ample scope for the manifestation of honest or dishonest purpose in the examination of its claims. 2. We wish to speak in more particular terms of the various occasions presented in the course of this examination for the exercise of such a purpose, and of the manner in which the evidences for the Christian faith, though altogether conclusive to an honest mind, still leaves the *will* uncompelled. We wish to premise a single remark under each of these heads, and will then proceed at once to the separate development of each.

In respect to the first head we would say that this feature of Christianity, of which we design to speak, harmonizes perfectly with all the other traits of the moral administration under which we live, in bearing testimony to the wisdom of God, and to the view which, in all his arrangements, he has to human volition and human virtue. In relation to the second head, we would make the obvious, though necessary remark, that in pointing out instances of dishonesty, we suppose Christianity not merely to have been heard of, but to have been seen and fairly presented to the mind.

1. We presume that all will agree with us in the statement that conscience has her part to perform in the direction of the mind, just as truly as in the direction of the life. In fact, so far as the character of a man's life depends upon his choice, it is the result either of those direct efforts of the will which produce external actions, or of those qualities of mind which the will has had an influence in producing. So far as a man's life does not either directly or indirectly flow from the free decisions of the will, so far, his life has the attribute of perfect innocence possessing no moral character. In strictness of speech, then, obedience and disobedience lie entirely within the mind,—and what we call *acts* of guilt are but the consequences of preceding acts of the will, in which all the guilt consists. Now it cannot be doubted that the movements of the will are continually exerting a control over the intellectual powers, in the discipline to which they are subjected, guiding them in the path which they pursue, and influencing them in a degree more or less marked, in all the service they perform in the formation of opinions and the acquisition of truth. We are very apt to talk of a man's faith or want of faith, as being entirely out of his own control, of his having his opinions imposed upon him by laws of the intellectual

nature whose operation he cannot resist. And the great reason why very many regard persecution for opinion's sake as a horrible thing, is found in their belief that opinion is in its nature involuntary. They regard those who are persecuted for their belief, much in the same light that they would those who should become the objects of reproach for having a peculiar bodily formation. But this persecution of the mind is to be condemned, not because it censures a belief which is unalterable, but because it prevents that *liberty* of belief which would otherwise exist; because it separates a man's conscience from his faith, and of course from his life; binds opinions upon him which he has not chosen, and thus, in its deadly grasp, crushes the moral nature. Persecution is horrible, because it hinders conscience in the free exercise of those most important functions which she has to perform in the hidden chambers of the mind. We do not mean to say that a man chooses his faith from the vast collection of human opinions, just as he selects an article of merchandise in a warehouse. But we do mean to say, that honest or dishonest purpose exerts a constant, though silent pressure, in shaping the course which the mind takes in the investigation of truth, and, by necessary consequence, in determining at what results it shall arrive. The student as he gropes his way may see a glimmer of heavenly truth, and yet turn away from it as the forest robber flies from the light of a human habitation. We may shut our eyes in mid-day, and pretend and even persuade *ourselves* that we are encompassed with darkness.

These remarks will apply to the study of any subject, but, as we are speaking of Christianity, we shall now make some remarks to show that, in the investigation of the claims of religion, there is room for the free action of the will.

The *term* Christianity is one which, in its ordinary use, covers a subject of so vast extent and various character, that, in considering the question, whether Christianity, as a *system of divine truth*, is worthy of credit, there is the greatest opportunity for the free action of the will,—and, consequently, for honest or dishonest purpose. The claims of Christianity no more force themselves, as philosophically just, upon the understanding than they force themselves upon the heart as worthy the welcome of its best affections.

For, when we speak of Christianity as an institution, how broad the field of topics embraced in the appellation. The imagination instinctively glances at the condition of the world

eighteen centuries ago, and traces its history along from that period to the present,—we think of all the successive and changing aspects of the human mind and human character, which have been shown up as this "long train of ages" has been gliding away, and of the action and influence of that new element,—the Christian Faith,—which during the whole time has been working with such energy in the human mind and character;—we see drawn out in long array before us the immense multitude of human establishments which Christianity has moulded into forms better suited to her own divine principles, and which she has borne along in the direction of her own deep current;—we are reminded of that long list of great, immortal names which have been written upon her covenants,—the names of those who have drunk deeply of her living water, and gazed reverently up at her glorious revelations;—we picture to ourselves the various fortune which she has received in the bosom of the church, and from the assaults of external adversaries;—we look around upon the earth, and we connect her blessed influence with everything great and noble that the eye can see, and her tender compassion and watchful anxiety with everything base and unworthy that has thus far resisted her kindness;—and we look forward into the future to the time, when she shall have transfused her spirit through all human institutions and all human hearts, when "they shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." Such a fullness of meaning has the word *Christianity*. Our religion can hardly be defined as consisting in a series of facts and a system of abstract doctrines. The facts and doctrines contained in the Christian Scriptures are so bound in with their influence and history,—religion, as a collection of abstract doctrines and truths, is so inseparably associated with religion as an *operative* thing, that, in common speech, we are obliged to consider these two correlative parts as joining to make up one entire whole.

Such is the multitude of topics comprised in the definition of Christianity. And the bearing which all these topics have on the revelation by Jesus is regarded by the true Christian with a kindling eye and a swelling soul. Not so with him who wishes to disbelieve. The vast field which Christianity occupies increases those opportunities for attack which he desires to improve. So much is to be examined that almost numberless temptations to unjust criticism are presented to him who would deal falsely with his understanding. The mind is

to be applied to so many points that dishonest purpose will often find the means to give it a false guidance. It has so often to be enlightened that, if there be a purpose to that end, it may every day be blinded. Attention may in some sense be regarded as the eye of the mind. It is that through which the mind apprehends or perceives the truth. Now who doubts the great power possessed over the attention by the will? Who does not feel that he has a power to exclude one truth from his thoughts and to bring another within the range of his mind, similar to the power he has to select any object from the material universe for the continued inspection of the eye. The power in the former case is more indirect, but not less real, than in the latter, and, different from that in the latter, is exerted not so much with reference to single points, as with reference to classes of objects. The will cannot select a particular thought for the contemplation of the intellect;—this implies the previous existence in the mind of the thought itself,—but it *can* select a *general* range of ideas for intellectual study. Who has not seen the power which in the advocate the will exerts to confine his mind to one view of a subject, to one range of argument? Now, by the power of habitual dishonesty in the will every one in the examination of Christian truth may lose the pure undistorted vision of candid simplicity, and act the part of the advocate in settling the claims of that truth on which his best hopes depend. In seeking salvation he may perpetually argue the cause of a selfish and perverted heart. If, in the very face of Christ's plainest miracles, the power of dishonest intention was such that the Jews could say "he casteth out devils by Beelzebub, the prince of the devils;"—the same power, skilfully trained and practised, may give one the hardihood to say, what the Jews could not say unless they should deny the evidence of the senses, that the miracles were not performed at all. We shall now go on to describe in several particulars, the influence exerted by a dishonest will in the examination of the evidences of Christianity.

1. The dishonesty of the philosophical unbeliever may appear in his taking an extremely partial view of the character of Christianity. Our faith is a completely harmonious whole. The admirable consistency of its separate parts gives strong presumption of its entire truth. Besides no part can be rightly understood or rightly judged, even in its intrinsic character, without a just view of its various connections. One part is strengthened by another, the questions suggested by one part

are resolved by another, and the difficulties vanish from every part the moment a comprehensive view is taken of the whole. Christianity may be termed an *arch-work* of truth, and he who forcibly rends a portion of Christian doctrine away from its connections and supports, introduces it among the articles of his own earthly creed, and then condemns it because inconsistent with that, in addition to his dishonesty, shows a folly like that of supposing that, because no weight can crush an arch, therefore any portion of that arch will, by itself, be equally stable. This violent sundering of the parts of Christianity, and then sneeringly asking for the evidence of its utility or truth, is like doubting about the value of a steam-engine, because, forsooth, we will look upon it as if it had no piston to communicate power to the various parts. We know that this partial judgment is a marked trait of vulgar minds when they make their decisions in the contests of individuals or the shocks of systems. One shout of triumph on account of supposed victory, though it relate to the most insignificant part of a controversy, with such minds decides the whole matter. The slightest embarrassment in a witness may lead them to condemn his whole testimony with the charge of a perjured conscience. That one who pretends to subject Christianity to a philosophical examination, should pursue the course into which others fall from narrowness or ignorance of mind, leaves a strong presumption against his character for honest dealing in the concerns of truth.

We will close our remarks under this point by an illustration of them drawn from the manner in which an infidel writer treats the subject of miracles. The reasoning proceeds thus. "Christianity pretends to be attested by miracles. Miracles are impossible,—therefore Christianity is false." The proofs establishing the fact that miracles were actually wrought are winked out of sight. The testimony borne to their actual occurrence in a history which cannot be contradicted, is treated as if it did not exist. The sublime character of the person to whom these miracles are ascribed, elevated as it was above every subterfuge and meanness, and as open to inspection as the face of heaven, is thought worthy of entire neglect. The state of the world, the dreadful degradation of man's religious nature, the pressing necessity there was that a voice from heaven should raise the human soul from its downward tendencies to a better faith and hope, are completely set aside. The actual and undeniable existence of religious principles in the mind, the vain strugglings of these principles to reach, by

their own efforts, a pure and worthy faith, the impossibility of establishing a religion on the direct authority of God,—such a religion as the whole world was crying out for,—without manifestations of the *power* of God,—all these things our philosophical rejecter of the religion of Jesus, deems worthy of not a moment's consideration. He says, miracles are impossible,—a statement just equivalent to a man's calling his own existence an impossibility, and denying that the earth on which he treads can be a real thing. If the miracle of the universe was possible, equally possible was the raising of Lazarus from the dead. But both these things required that the same Almighty hand should move. Any man who admits an eternal Existence and Power, must admit that miracles may be performed on any fit occasion. He who denies this eternal Existence and Power, cannot possibly preserve his consistency without denying *all* existence and all power.

The infidel says it is impossible to comprehend an Almighty Being. We reply that it is *necessary* to conceive of and admit his existence, and we ask him which is easier, to believe in the eternity of a Supreme Being, or to believe that nothing exists, not even the mind that believes or disbelieves.

We would, then, inquire of the philosophical infidel whether he has treated Christianity with the *mind* of a philosopher, whether he has looked at Christianity in its whole broad and glorious character, or whether, with a dishonest will, he has taken but partial glances, and grasped at specious objections, and turned away the eye of his mind from the light of the truth? He seems to think that if he proposes a single plausible objection against some comparatively unimportant feature of Christianity when he has torn it away from its living connections and dependencies, the whole system receives its deathblow at his hand. And what renders this course of proceeding the more unfair, he takes for Christianity anything that has ever assumed its name,—and because some human addition to the oracles of truth seems to him unworthy of God, therefore, in his view, God has never spoken to the world. Thus, if he possess anything like enlargement of mind and has proceeded with deliberate intention, he has boen guilty of two intellectual crimes. They are crimes against himself, and therefore not noticed by human law,—but they are crimes against the soul,—the soul which bears in itself the testimony that it is God's noblest work, and to whose perfection all the movements of his creative energy conspire. We would beseech the infidel to come to the Oracles of Truth with his

mind and his heart open, and gaze at all their glorious revelations in their own full harmony and perfect proportion, and we assure him that then he will soon feel his soul swelling with the consciousness of its immortality, and that he will experience a sublimity of spiritual elevation that will make him look down with scorn upon his former faith in the life of his body as the only life of his soul.

Other points may be considered at a future time.

C. A. B.

NOTICES OF BOOKS.

Forgiveness of Sin. A Practical Exposition on Psalm CXXX. *By* John Owen, D. D. *Abridged by* Ebenezer Porter, D. D. Boston, William Pierce. 1834.

The compiler of this work of the former Vice Chancellor of the University of Oxford remarks in his Preface, that "it is much to be lamented that the writings of Owen, distinguished as they are by strength of original thought and depth of pious feeling, should be substantially lost to the present and all coming generations, by the pleonastic phraseology with which they are encumbered." He professes to give the sentiments of Owen in the words of Owen, "excepting that the process of blotting has often left a *part* of his words to represent the whole; and, in a small proportion of sentences, the change of a word or two has been deemed indispensable."

The idea the compiler seems to have of Dr. Owen's writings is this,—that they are distinguished for depth and originality of thought, yet rendered obscure and diffuse by what he calls an "endless multiplication of tautologies, aud epithets, and adjuncts."

We agree with the compiler that a strain of pious feeling runs through this book which may render it useful. Wherever we see anything of the spirit of the Christian faith, though this spirit be blended with some doctrines that we deem erroneous, and though its manifestation be not connected with much of intellectual power, we feel it our duty to speak, in the first place, of the exhibition of that spirit in words of commendation. But we

confess we cannot see in this production much evidence of strong thought. The preface speaks of the great diffuseness of the original work. Diffuse indeed it must be, for we never should have supposed the work under our hands to be an *abridgment*. And this diffuseness, alone, furnishes a presumption that the work is not marked by strong thought. If the thought be forceful, so will the manner and the style. The manner of the mind's manifestation seems a part of the mind itself. If one reads a book whose value he is capable of appreciating, and if he does not have in himself the sentiment and consciousness of its power, he cannot well conceive that it was composed with great energy of mental action. We should call the thought in this book just and true thought rather than strong thought. Its strength is made weakness by excessive expansion. A piece of solid metallic gold furnishes some resistance to whatever touches it, but it loses that quality, though it is still gold, when it is changed into a gas. The mind of our author, as it appears in the work before us, seems to be a magazine furnished with all varieties of thought and knowledge, rather than a strong, logical, *reasoning* mind. It seems to possess little of that mastering power of intellect, by which all the ideas expressed upon a given subject are kept in a constant state of convergency towards some distinct end. There is, to be sure, a great appearance of method. We have those numberless series of divisions which we so often meet with in the old writers. But every day we see how completely the form of method may be preserved while its spirit is lost. The method of our author is not so much a method regulated according to the universal laws of mind as by the somewhat arbitrary fancies and periods of his own mind. He has the discursiveness with nothing like the richness or power of Jeremy Taylor. We do sometimes meet with a very good thought,—and oftentimes with one that is pleasant from its quaintness. We will make a short extract in illustration.

"Gifts are bestowed to trade with for God; opportunities are the market-days for that trade. To napkin up the one and let slip the other, will end in trouble and perplexities of heart. God loses a revenue of glory by such slothful souls; and he will make them sensible of it."—p. 28.

This whole work, consisting of 252 pages, is employed in an exposition on the 130th Psalm. The Psalm itself, which is comprised in eight verses, is very simple and easy of comprehension. And perhaps the efforts to give such unreasonable extension to the few, though exceedingly beautiful and touching, thoughts of the original, has been one great cause of that dilution of ideas and that want of method of which we complain. Many trains of thought, possessing considerable intrinsic value, have but little of pertinence or direct bearing upon the subject discussed.

It may be said that the intention of such a work as the present being to extend the power of practical religion, all that is wanted is a depth and fullness of pious emotion, and that conciseness of style and a close logical order of thought are qualities of comparatively little importance. Such a remark as this would seem to us to discover very little knowledge of the intimacy and nature of that union which subsists between the intellectual and moral nature. Right thought has a natural alliance with deep feeling. We are strongly moved when there is *occasion* to be moved. There is a connection between truth and the heart. The character of the life is determined by the influence of truth on the heart. It was in view of truth, presented in a clear and condensed form, that the Athenians cried out, "Let us march against Philip." It was in view of clear and orderly truth, that Paul poured forth a sudden burst of pious feeling in the exclamation, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift." And the truth must be impressed upon the heart in a consistent and logical method, in order to excite *strong* and *consistent* emotion. Even a *pious* mind, if it present only those loose trains of thought which may chance to succeed each other in its own experience, can hardly make its reverential and grateful emotions strongly felt by others, or excite in them emotions of a kindred nature. The topic we have here touched we think of great importance. We have hardly *stated* it, yet we have no space to give it such development as it deserves.

By what we have said, we by no means wish to have it supposed that we believe the work before us to possess no value. The faults which we think we have marked in it are not faults entirely peculiar to itself. But we do wish that works of this description, intended chiefly to move the heart, might have a more just, philosophical adaptation to its character and wants, believing that, with such adaptation, they would effect a vastly greater amount of good than they do. A man must possess and exhibit *mental* power, to make his *moral* power act through the press upon the hearts of his fellow-men. B.

CORRESPONDENCE AND INTELLIGENCE.

FIFTH LETTER TO REV. ADIN BALLOU.

Harvard, October 13, 1834.

Dear Sir,

I did say, "I should be glad if our brethren of the Restorationist denomination could feel justified in giving their distinguishing doctrines a less conspicuous place,—in dwelling on them with less frequency, and in

considering them of less importance. They might insist on a future righteous retribution without defining the duration of it; neither asserting nor denying its eternity in their daily instruction." But it seems from your reply, that you cannot do this conveniently, consistently, or conscientiously. If your peculiar doctrine is so important in your estimation; and if so many reasons urge you to proclaim it, I will submit, without attempting to turn you from what you consider the path of duty. And if you feel constrained to pursue this course, I trust you will not think it strange, if others, who entertain different opinions, do not always sympathize and coöperate with you. I have thought and wished there might be more union, sympathy, and coöperation between us; and I know of no better way to secure it than the one I suggested above. I would not encourage disguise and duplicity, nor counsel one to conceal his sentiments, nor to hide important gospel truths; but we may overrate the importance of those opinions which distinguish us from our brethren. We are very apt to do so. It has however afforded me a greater pleasure to observe in how many things others agreed with me, than it has to observe in how many things we differed. I love society; I would gladly have intercourse with all pious persons. I want their sympathy and counsel. It is painful to me to think that our fellowship and communion are so sadly interrupted. How often have I felt the need of Christian associates, to whom I could confidently disclose my hopes and fears, my joys and sorrows; with whom I might earnestly engage in religious conversation, and know that it was equally interesting to them as to myself! And how often has such a privilege been denied me! And why? Were there no pious persons in my neighbourhood? Yes, many. But differences in faith kept them strangers to me.

You mention the course you had pursued as a religious teacher;—it will be my apology for stating what has generally been my own. I have often gone to preach in those places where many were opposed to my faith; where Unitarianism is identified with all that is vile and odious. I did not, on such occasions, consider it important that I should tell them in so many words, that I was a Unitarian. This was already known to my employers, and it was known also to those with whom I was not connected and who might hear me, if they had the desire and courage. Nor have I been forward to introduce controverted topics. In such places, where I was only to spend a Sabbath or two, or give a single lecture, my preaching has been more generally practical. I have dwelt on those subjects which can never be justly deemed unimportant nor unseasonable. Seldom, if ever, on such occasions, have I laboured to disprove the doctrine of the Trinity. It was no secret to my audience that I was a Unitarian. But many of my hearers knew not what importance I attached to the practical and vital parts of Christianity. They knew that I rejected the doctrine of the Trinity. But rumour had been busy in telling them, that I rejected the Bible also,—that I was an enemy to God and Christ, in disguise,—that I was secretly attempting to destroy the authority and influence of religion,—that I made no account of repentance, regeneration, prayer, and a holy and devout life,—that I felt no solicitude about the spiritual and eternal welfare of my fellow-men,—that my views of religion had nothing in them to arouse the conscience, to touch and warm the heart, to guide the sinner into the way of salvation, and to sustain the soul under all the trying circumstances of life. It has been my wish and endeavour to remove such prejudices, and to efface such wrong impressions,—to let it be known that, though I was a Unitarian, I professed and desired to be a Christian also,—that I felt interested and earnest in the cause of religion, and in the progress of virtue and holiness,—that I wished not only to increase the number of those who would be receivers and advocates of the doctrine of the divine Unity, but also to increase the number of those who would be the faithful and humble followers of Jesus Christ, and who would adorn a profession of godliness with a pious life. So I

have urged upon my hearers the duties of repentance, faith, prayer, personal holiness, and growth in grace and Christian knowledge. I have endeavoured to excite in them a deeper interest in religion,—a greater reverence for the gospel,—a more lively sense of their accountability to God,—a more earnest inquiry about what they must do to be saved,—and a more careful and constant attention to the things belonging to their peace. I have endeavoured to guard them against infidelity, fanaticism, and uncharitableness,—to exhibit not only the plain doctrines of the gospel, but also to direct their attention to its precepts and spirit. I have been more earnest to tell my hearers what I did believe, than what I disbelieved,—and to leave the impression on their minds that I had a stronger desire that they should become disciples of Christ, than members of any religious party. I have thought that in this way I could do more for the cause of truth and holiness than by discussing some controverted subject, which might fix the attention and gratify an idle curiosity, but would do nothing for the heart. There are a great many who are sadly indifferent and stupid about religion, even when it is divested of all that is irrational and superstitious. While they can hear no preacher but an Orthodox one, they are negligent and would find an excuse for their not joining the church and for their absence from public worship in the creed to which they must assent, and in the minister who is to guide them in their devotions and instruct them. But remove these obstacles; give them the privileges and advantages which they imagine would satisfy them; and are they constant at church? Do they become professors of religion? Too many of them still remain heedless and bold. They join a Restorationist or a Unitarian society, and continue to neglect their religious duties. They love to talk about the absurdities and extravagances of Orthodoxy; but vital, personal piety is what they have never felt the need of. I have supposed that many such persons come to hear us preach, not because they wish to know the truth, so that by it they may become holy and free; not because they are anxious to learn what they must do to be saved, but because they hope to hear something said against Orthodoxy. They admire and applaud us, not as disciples and ministers of Christ, but as opposers of Calvinism. I am a Unitarian, and I am neither ashamed nor afraid to confess it. I should rejoice to have all embrace the same faith, since I believe it to be the faith of the glorious gospel. But I should not be satisfied with barely winning their assent to my creed, and with numbering them as belonging to my denomination; my object is not attained till they become Christians in heart and life.

You will excuse me, my dear brother, for dwelling so long on these things. Though we may differ in doctrine, and in our methods of operating upon the minds of others, I trust we both feel earnest to promote the cause of truth and piety. If you will not charge me with flattery, I will here tell you with what pleasure I have read some of the last numbers of the Messenger. They contained but little that was controversial, and much that was practical; and while they were almost silent about your peculiar doctrine, they were calculated to do much for it by the earnestness with which they enforced practical piety. Not that the preceding numbers were destitute of practical instruction; but in these I thought it abounded. It gave me the impression that your paper was changing for the better, and that its influence would be more salutary. When I read the religious journals and papers published by other sects, I am eager to know, not only with what arguments and spirit, with what frequency and power, they defend their peculiar tenets, but also what attention they pay to the precepts of religion generally. And when I discover that they are earnestly and often enforcing all the great Christian duties included in denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, and in living soberly, righteously, and piously, it gives me a delightful sensation. There is a great deal of sin and misery in the world; and when I see men, by whatever name they may be called, ardently and perseveringly engaged in meliorating

the human condition, it makes my heart glad. It inclines me to think of their errors in doctrine with more patience and charity.

I have taken no notice of your answers to my letters which have appeared in the Unitarian, and which you have had the generosity to publish in the Messenger. I have been silent about them, not through disrepect nor indifference, but because I found it would be attended with considerable difficulty and inconvenience, were I to reply to each of them, while answering your first letter. I know not, indeed, whether you expected it; I barely mention it here to prevent any disagreeable thoughts in regard to the subject; I ought to have mentioned it sooner. Forgive me, if it has occasioned you any solicitude.

I am, dear sir, your friend and brother,

JONATHAN FARR.

REV. ADIN BALLOU.

THE BOSTON SUNDAY-SCHOOL SOCIETY.

The general objects of this society are in this vicinity well known, as are also its annual meetings, holden for the purpose of collecting information relative to the prosperity of the great cause of religious education throughout the State, and of giving to benevolent hearts new impulses to effort in the promotion of that cause. Hereafter the managers of the society propose, and, as we think, most wisely, to hold quarterly meetings of the society, at each of which reports may be read from several of the schools, and mutual excitement gained from the sympathy of the meeting and from the remarks which gentlemen may offer on any of the interesting topics embraced in the general subjects of Sunday-school instruction. We have said we think this plan a wise one. Even "pure minds" need to be stirred up "by way of remembrance." And we are induced to insert this notice on account of the strong satisfaction, and, as we trust, the *lasting* excitement which we gained from attending the first of these quarterly meetings which was holden the 7th ult. This meeting was opened by an appropriate prayer from Rev. Mr. Lothrop, and presided over by the venerable Dr. Tuckerman, so distinguished among us for his spirit of benevolence in the cause of the poor,—a benevolence, if we may say it here, possessing a rare combination of traits,—having all the enthusiasm of *ideal*, and all the sober and business-like cast of *practical* philanthropy. Reports, which, we may here remark, are read not to be formally accepted, but to give information of the state of the schools to which they relate, were presented from Rev. Mr. Pierpont's church, Rev. Mr. Lothrop's church, and from Rev. Mr. Barrett's church. After the reading of the reports, the meeting was kept in a constant state of excitement by the remarks of gentlemen interested in the subject and connected with Sunday schools, and was concluded by an impressive address from Rev. Dr. Tuckerman, and the singing of a hymn.

The reports gave a most encouraging account of the success of teachers in the three Sunday schools from which they were made. The children were represented not only as willing to receive instruction, but as hungering for the bread of life,—as longing, with the eagerness of an unsatisfied want, to have those fountains opened within them from which should proceed the "well of water springing up into everlasting life." Every thing indeed that we hear of the results flowing from judicious Sunday-school instruction, gives us a continually strengthening conviction of the power that may be given to the principle of faith even in the child's

mind. In fact we do not ask for any *information* as to success to prove to us that right efforts *must* meet with success. The capacity of the child for religious instruction is established on authority whose obligation can neither be denied nor increased. "Of such is the kingdom of heaven." Let this brief reply be made to all who doubt as to the event of strong benevolent effort in the cause of the young. "Suffer little children to come unto me." No other words need be uttered in the hearing of those who would wave away the young from the altar of instruction and the throne of prayer. Let us not have our minds so entirely closed to the sublimity of that scene with the children as at first were most of the actors immediately concerned in it. Let those who believe that young hearts may have the kingdom of God built up within them, and young hands, perchance, build up that kingdom in the world,—let such draw excitement from the incomparable grandeur with which that scene invests the character of Jesus. The sublimity of the Saviour's words and of the act with which he accompanied them are equalled by the simplicity of the narration. We will even venture to quote the language once more, in hope that the mind of every young reader may gaze upon it till its glory dawns upon his soul. "Then were brought unto him little children that he should put his hands on them and pray: and the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, suffer little children, and forbid them not to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven. And he laid his hands on them and departed thence." Matt. xix. 13—16. These simple words are a bulwark of defence for Christianity which none of the weapons of the infidel can overthrow.

But, in noticing the Sunday-school society, we did not intend to be drawn into such a course of remark on the general object proposed in Sunday schools. One great object of the quarterly meetings of the society is to discuss the comparative wisdom and utility of the different modes of instruction which are pursued in different schools. We would close in saying to those who promote the interests of this society,—God speed you. You are engaged in a humble task, but a great one. You are working silently but with vast effect. Your efforts may not gain you a splendid name, but they will gain you a rejoicing conscience. The world may not praise you now with its *voice*, but it will praise you with its *character* ages hence.

ORDINATIONS AND INSTALLATION.

Mr. George W. Briggs was ordained at Fall River, Sept. 24. Sermon by Rev. F. A. Farley of Providence.

Mr. John L. Russel was ordained at Salem, Oct. 9. Sermon by Rev. Charles C. Sewall.

Mr. Horatio Wood was ordained at Walpole, Sept. 24. Sermon by Rev. Jason Whitman.

Mr. Samuel May was ordained at Leicester, Sept. 13. Sermon by Rev. F. W. P. Greenwood.

Rev. Benjamin Huntoon was installed over the First Congregational Parish, in Milton, Oct. 15. Sermon by Rev. Dr. Harris.

Several gentlemen within the last few months have been ordained to preach the everlasting Gospel in the West. We shall give an account of these ordinations in our next in connection with some appropriate remarks.